

FACT SHEET

HEPATITIS B

Information for Persons with Acute Hepatitis

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that enters the bloodstream and then infects the liver.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis B is most often spread from person to person through contact with infected semen, vaginal secretions, or blood. Having sex with an infected person and sharing needles for drug use are two very common ways that people become infected. Babies born to infected mothers and people who live in the house with a "carrier" of hepatitis B are also at risk.

What happens after a person is exposed to hepatitis B?

After a person is exposed to hepatitis B, several things may happen: 1) they may not become infected, 2) they may become infected but not get sick, or 3) they may become infected and get sick.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

It takes anywhere from 2 - 6 months after exposure before the symptoms of infection show.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include being very tired, nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, tea-colored urine, and yellowing of skin and eyes (jaundice). Symptoms may be mild or they may be very severe. Remember, most people infected with hepatitis B do not develop all these symptoms and may never know they are infected.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

Most adults with hepatitis B will get rid of the virus within 4 to 6 months but are able to spread the infection during this time. After their body gets rid of the infection they will no longer be capable of giving the infection to others and they can never get it again. However, about one out of every 10 infected adults, and as many as 9 of 10 infected babies, will become life-long "carriers" of hepatitis B, meaning that they do not get rid of the virus and can infect others. Most hepatitis B carriers have no symptoms of hepatitis, but some will develop serious liver disease years later.

What can you do to take care of yourself?

- Avoid alcoholic beverages and street drugs. They will damage your liver.
- Avoid taking prescription or over-the-counter medicines unless your doctor tells you it is OK.
- Eat a healthy diet (low fat) and get enough rest. If you are vomiting after eating tell your doctor.
 - a. See your doctor for a check-up and discuss having a blood test (6 months after you first became infected) to see if you have become a carrier of hepatitis B. Carriers may develop serious liver disease in the future and can pass the disease on to others.
- If you get pregnant, tell your doctor you have hepatitis B. The baby will need to receive hepatitis B immune globulin and the first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine at birth. The baby will also need to complete the vaccine series by 6 months of age and then have post-vaccination testing to assure they are protected.
- Contact the American Liver Foundation for more information (toll-free: 1-800-223-0179).

What can you do to protect others?

- Cover all cuts and sores with a bandage and wash hands well after touching blood or body fluids.
- Throw away any items that have your blood on them, such as bandages and menstrual pads, in plastic bags and close tightly. Wash hands well after touching your blood or body fluids.
- Clean up blood spills with paper towels. Then clean the area with a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 100 parts water, one-quarter cup bleach to a gallon of water).
- Tell your sex partner that you have hepatitis B, use a condom, and encourage your partner to be tested and, if necessary, vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Have your sex partners and all those living in your household to see a doctor for testing and for hepatitis B vaccination. Do not allow anyone to come into contact with your blood or body fluids.
- Do not share chewing gum, toothbrushes, razors, scissors, needles for ear piercing, nail files, or anything else that may come in contact with your blood or body fluids.
- Do not share food, drink, cigarettes, lipstick, or lip balm.
- Do not share syringes and needles
- Do not donate blood, plasma, body organs, sperm, or breast milk